

P 020740Z DEC 85
FM AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1170
INFO AMEMBASSY BANDKOK
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 1399

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [XX](#)

SUBJECT: SULTAN OF BRUNEI STRIKES TWO MORE RAPID BLOWS AT
ISLAMIZATION

REF: BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 1379

11. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT

12. AS REPORTED REFTEL THE SULTAN OF BRUNEI BOYCOTTED ACTIVITIES MARKING THE PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY ON NOV 25 IN ANGER AT THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE HAVING INTRODUCED SEPARATION OF THE SEXES AT THE CELEBRATION. EVEN THOUGH THE DECISION TO SEPARATE THE SEXES WAS REVERSED, NO MEMBER OF THE ROYAL FAMILY PARTICIPATED. WHILE THE SHOCK WAVES FROM THIS CONTRETEMPS WERE STILL REVERBERATING AROUND BRUNEI THE SULTAN TOOK TWO MORE STEPS TO UNDO INNOVATIONS INTRODUCED BY ISLAMIC CONSERVATIVES.

13. ON NOV 27, WITHOUT ANY PRIOR WARNING, NEWSCASTERS ON RADIO TELEVISION BRUNEI (RTB) APPEARED WITHOUT HEAD COVERING. THE PRACTICE OF HAVING NEWSCASTERS WEAR HEAD COVERING, THE WOMEN TIGHT-FITTING SCARVES THAT FASTEN UNDER THE CHIN AND MEN THE TRADITIONAL MALAY SONGKOK, WAS GRADUALLY INTRODUCED OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS; AND IT HAD BEEN ABOUT A YEAR SINCE ANY FEMALE APPEARED ON THE TELEVISION NEWS WITH UNCOVERED HEAD. SINCE NOV 27 HEAD COVERINGS HAVE COMPLETELY DISAPPEARED, AND IT IS NOW WIDELY KNOWN THAT A WRITTEN ORDER BANNING HEAD COVERING WAS ISSUED BY PRINCE JEFRI, WHO AS MINISTER OF CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORTS IS RESPONSIBLE FOR TELEVISION, AND THAT THE ORDER HAD BEEN CLEARED WITH THE SULTAN. (THE ORDER ALMOST CERTAINLY ORIGINATED WITH THE SULTAN).

14. NEXT, ON NOV 30, IT WAS ANNOUNCED ON THE EVENING TELEVISION NEWS THAT, BY COMMAND OF THE SULTAN AND EFFECTIVE THE FOLLOWING DAY, THE BRUNEI GOVERNMENT OFFICE OF INFORMATION WAS ABOLISHED AS A SEPARATE ENTITY AND ITS FUNCTIONS TRANSFERRED TO A JOINT BROADCASTING/INFORMATION DEPARTMENT TO BE HEADED BY RTB DIRECTOR PENGIRAN BADARRUDIN AND THAT THE LIKE-NAMED PEHIN BADARRUDIN, HEAD OF THE INFORMATION DEPARTMENT, WAS TRANSFERRED BACK TO THE RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT. THUS BROADCASTING AND INFORMATION WERE RESTORED TO THE SITUATION THAT EXISTED PRIOR TO THE FORMATION OF A SEPARATE INFORMATION DEPARTMENT, WHICH UNDER PEHIN BADARRUDIN WAS WELL KNOWN FOR ITS VIGOROUS DISSEMINATION OF RELIGIOUSLY CONSERVATIVE VIEWPOINTS, WITH THE DEPARTMENT EDITED GOVERNMENT INFORMATION BULLETIN HAVING BECOME A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE MUFTI OF BRUNEI. THE INFORMATION FUNCTION NOW COMES UNDER THE CONTROL OF A MAN WHO IS ANATHEMA TO RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES.

15. COMMENT: IF THERE WAS DOUBT IN ANYONE'S MIND THAT THE SULTAN'S INTENT WAS TO STRIKE A BLOW AT CREEPING ISLAMIZATION, THAT DOUBT HAS NOW BEEN DISPELLED. BY MOVING QUICKLY TO UNDO TWO OF THE MOST VISIBLE SIGNS OF ISLAMIZATION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE HUMILIATION OF THE ORGANIZERS OF THE PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS, INCLUDING MOST NOTABLY MINISTER OF HEALTH AND EDUCATION ABDUL AZIZ, THE SULTAN CAUGHT THE PROponents OF ISLAMIZATION AT A WEEK MOMENT. THE EMBASSY REGARDS THIS AS A WELL EXECUTED MANEUVER ON THE SULTAN'S PART, IF SUCCESSFUL, A HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT FOR BRUNEI. THERE MAY STILL, OF COURSE, BE SOME REACTION, WHICH COULD CENTER AROUND THE SULTAN'S FATHER WHEN HE RETURNS FROM MEDICAL TREATMENT IN ENGLAND; BUT THE STATE OF THE SERI BEGAWAN'S PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH MAKE IT QUESTIONABLE THAT HE COULD LEAD A SUSTAINED CAMPAIGN IN FAVOR OF GREATER ISLAMIZATION.

¶6. THE ADVOCATES OF ISLAMIC FUNDEMENTALISM IN BRUNEI,
INSPIRED BY EXAMPLES FROM ELSEWHERE IN THE ISLAMIC
WORLD, APPARENTLY FORGOT IN THEIR ZEAL TO SERVE GOD THAT
THEY HAD NEGLECTED TO CONSULT CAESAR.

KING